

## **Task Force D Meeting Summary**

### **Tuesday, June 20, 2006**

Participants: Tom Bloomer – Burr Oaks Farm, Bill Bobier – Full Circle Farm, Elaine Brown – Michigan Food and Farming Systems, Patty Cantrell – Michigan Land Use Institute, Mike Hamm – MI State University, Terri Novak – MI Department of Environmental Quality, Chris Peterson – MSU Product Center, Justin Rashid – American Spoon Foods (chair), Robin Rosenbaum – MI Department of Agriculture, Dennis West – Northern Initiatives.

Additional Participants: Soji Adelaja – MI State University, Susan Cocciarelli – MI State University, Rich Harlow – MI Department of Agriculture, Ken Nye – MI Farm Bureau.

The sixth Task Force D: Enhancing Agricultural Viability meeting convened Tuesday, June 20, 2006 from 1:00 – 3:00 pm at MDA's Geagley Lab in East Lansing. Council Member Justin Rashid chaired the meeting.

Mr. Rashid called the meeting to order, and stated the goal of the meeting, which was to develop a recommendation on the topic of farmland preservation in Michigan. He introduced presenters Rich Harlow from MDA, and Soji Adelaja from Michigan State University's Land Policy Institute.

Rich Harlow, MDA's Farmland and Open Space Preservation Program Manager, delivered a presentation to the task force describing the current state programs and lands preserved under those programs. Mr. Harlow described the PA 116 program, and the fact that farmland is leaving the PA 116 program and the state does not have sufficient funding to purchase development rights on farmland. The state currently has an Agricultural Preservation Fund, which it grants to qualifying communities to purchase development rights on farmland. He suggested to the task force that the current programs and funding are not sufficient to address the state's farmland preservation needs. The program is currently also limited by the fact that non-full-time farmers are not eligible for PA 116, while 45% of farmers are not full-time farmers.

Soji Adelaja, Director of the Land Policy Institute at Michigan State University, presented the research that he and his colleagues have performed to explore the issue of farmland preservation in Michigan. Dr. Adelaja emphasized the point that farmland preservation is inextricably linked to farm preservation; preserving the piece of land is virtually pointless if farming is not a viable venture. The Land Policy Institute is currently completing a series of four research papers on the topic of farmland preservation.

The four reports by the Land Policy Institute investigate options for a vision for the future of Michigan farmland (including preserved acreage and funding goals), options for funding farmland preservation, and ideas to increase farm viability.

The task force participants agreed that given the breadth and depth of research already available on this topic (from the Land Policy Institute and prior recommendations of the Michigan Land Use Leadership Council), it is appropriate to develop a very specific and focused recommendation based on this research. Task force participants discussed the information presented to them and reached general agreement on a recommendation, concluding that some work on this recommendation can continue at the July Task Force D meeting. MFPC staff will further develop this recommendation (D6) and send it to the Task Force for feedback and input. The first draft of the recommendation for further Task Force comment is:

**Recommendation D6: Preserve at least 1 million acres of farmland over the next ten years, and maintain the viability of the farms on that land.**

- a) The state should develop an official “vision” for farmland preservation, with acreage preservation targets, explicit funding strategies and programs, and evaluation benchmarks to facilitate and document progress toward this vision.
- b) The state should put \$100 million into the Agricultural Preservation Fund to preserve farmland in partnership with local communities, with the following stipulations:
  - i) Five percent of this fund should be dedicated to agricultural viability efforts and encouraging innovation in agriculture.
  - ii) Local communities should establish 50% match for farmland preservation efforts.

At the next Task Force D meeting, task force members will complete this recommendation (D6), and MFPC staff will present materials from the other task forces and an overview of the work of the Council to date. The next meeting will be on Wednesday, July 12, 2006, 1:30 – 3:30 pm at the Geagley Lab in East Lansing.